

Adm. Collins visits CGC Tahoma

GUANTANAMO BAY, Cuba, Jan. 3 — Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Thomas H. Collins visited the CGC Tahoma off the coast of Haiti today as the cutter patrolled for go-fast boats and migrants headed to the United States.

He spent almost 24 hours on the Tahoma as it conducted flight operations, right-of-approach questioning on a Panamanian coastal freighter, and underway training. In addition, he spent time with the crew to discuss Coast Guard issues and listen to their concerns.

"I always look forward to getting out to the field to see our young men and women in action," said Collins. "With issues like Deepwater, Rescue 21 and transitioning to the new department constantly at the forefront, we can't forget what has been the mainstay of our organization for over 200 years — men and women setting to sea to carry out our multiple missions. With all the changes taking place in our organization, we must ensure that operational excellence remains our top priority."

The Commandant also spent some time behind the helm while aboard the cutter.

"Helmsman, rudder amidships," said Ensign Jason Haag, the officer-of-the-deck. "Rudder amidships, aye sir," responded the Commandant. The admiral then set the ship's rudder at amidships and informed the officer-of-the-deck when the rudder angle indicator reached zero degrees. And so, for a few minutes, the Coast Guard's most senior officer stood watch under the

guidance of the helmsman, Seaman Justin Rowe, and one of the ship's most junior officers.

As Collins' visit to the Tahoma came to a close, Commanding Officer Capt. Gary Smialek awarded the Commandant a letter designating him a master helmsman.

"It is only appropriate that the person steering our organization through this dynamic period is designated a master helmsman," said Smialek.

"Whenever I visit any operational command, I leave with my head a little higher," said Collins. "The dedication and effort put forth by our people on a daily basis is the reason why we are the world's best Coast Guard. That drive and desire defines us, and no where is that more evident than at our field units."

Cmdr. John Fitzgerald, G-C



LEFT: Commandant of the Coast Guard, Adm. Thomas H. Collins presents a Cutterman Pin to FS3 Jon DiCarlo.

TOP: Collins has dinner on the messdeck with Coast Guard Tahoma crewmembers BM1 Eric Baruzzi, TC3 Mike Holt and SK3 Penny Benson. He spent more than two hours discussing Coast Guard issues with the crew.

RIGHT: Collins is given a tour of the Tahoma's engine room by EM1 Byron Belmas.

